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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1444
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC//USDP:PDUSDP/ISA:EUR/ISA:NESA/DSCA// PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5// PRIORITY
RUEHAK/USDAO ANKARA TU PRIORITY
RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 000671

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/21/2017

TAGS: PREL PGOV MARR TU

SUBJECT: TURKISH DEFMIN GONUL URGES AGAINST CLOSURE OF NATO
CC AIR IZMIR

REF: ANKARA 632

Classified By: CDA Nancy McEldowney, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Minister of National Defense Vecdi Gonul expressed to Ambassador on March 21 Turkey's concerns regarding NATO consideration in the Command Structure PE review of closing Component Command Air Izmir. Closure of that command would be "bad news for the Turkish people" for two reasons, according to Gonul. Foremost, Air Izmir provides a "buffer" between Turkey and Greece, a forum for US and other NATO members to diffuse tensions over Aegean air and maritime issues between the two neighbors before they escalate. Secondly, Air South, the predecessor to Air Izmir, had been a 4-star command and was downgraded to a 3-star with the establishment of Air Izmir. This had been difficult for the Turkish public to accept and the complete closure of the command would be a "serious problem" for the public.

¶2. (C) Ambassador responded that this issue arose during the March 5 visit to Turkey of US Ambassador to NATO Nuland. While the US is not in control of such a NATO decision, Ambassador Nuland had expressed sympathy for the Turkish position and said the issue would require further study and discussion.

¶3. (C) Gonul passed to the Ambassador a copy of a letter to Defense Secretary Gates dated February 16 on this topic. Text of the letter is contained below:

BEGIN TEXT:

Ankara 16 February 2007

H.E. Mr. Robert Gates
Secretary of Defence

SIPDIS
USA

Dear Mr. Secretary,

I am writing to convey to you our views concerning the ongoing study about PE Review of the NATO Command Structure (NCS).

As has been expressed clearly on several occasion by the Turkish authorities, the draft Military Committee memorandum on this subject is not consistent with the Political Guidance provided by SG (2006) 0562, dated 31 July 2006.

We feel that the Political Guidance given to the NATO military authorities is designed to review the peacetime establishment of the current NATO command structure and does not provide any tasking for the review the command structure.

We believe that it is not appropriate to reduce the number of NATO HQs simply due to the shortfalls we face in filling posts at HQs. We are concerned that such a move may cause a significant decrease in the effectiveness of the command structure. We think that, the primary leading factor in this process should be operational requirements.

WE are of the view that the presence of two CC-Air HQs will always be beneficial to NATO for the fulfillment of the Ministerial Guidance 2006. In this regard, we note with appreciation the memorandum submitted by USA to Military Committee on 19 January 2007 that supports the need for two ACCs in line with our position. Unfortunately, the MC report on Phase 1 (dated 31 Jan 07) envisages a single ACC within NCS.

The geographical distribution of the NATO Headquarters is also of special importance for the maintenance of NATO's coordination and interoperability requirements, therefore we attach special importance to preserving the CC-Air HQ Izmir.

Mr Secretary,

Turkey has been a leading member and force contributor to the Alliance for over 50 years. Given the range of threats and challenges Turkey faces in its region, we strongly believe that it is essential that NATO maintains a substantial presence in our country. It will not be possible to explain to the Turkish public the reasons why NATO is reducing its presence in Turkey.

We earnestly hope that US will find it possible to continue to lend its valuable support to Turkey as regards to this important matters.

Kindest Regards

M. Vecdi Gonul
Minister of National Defence
Republic of Turkey

END TEXT.

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/ankara/>

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